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Report of the Security Council

Strengthening of the United Nations system

Letter dated 17 December 2012 from the Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you herewith the statement I delivered at the open briefing by the Chair of the Informal Working Group of the Security Council on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions held on Friday, 14 December 2012 (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 30 and 118, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) José Filipe **Moraes Cabral**
Ambassador

13-20433 (E) 240113

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Annex

Briefing on the work of the Informal Working Group of the Security Council on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions

Ambassador José Filipe Moraes Cabral
Chairman of the Informal Working Group
14 December 2012

It is a particular pleasure for me to brief you on the work of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, which I have had the honour to chair since January of this year.

Chairing a working group, more than helping build consensus, which is always necessary, is also trying to develop an agenda and acting as a catalyst for the efforts of its members towards achieving major common shared goals.

The Working Group on working methods is a particularly interesting case, in which Council members can share their views on ways to improve the Council's working methods and have the opportunity to make a difference, with future implications on the way the Council functions.

It is never easy to get away from routine, which is always more comfortable than change. So, it is always a difficult task to generate interest on new measures, discuss their usefulness and practicability and, eventually, adopt them. More difficult is, ultimately, to persuade all of the need to change. I must say that the experience I had was very positive. I counted on the active contribution of all members in the many discussions we held during this last year, at a pace of one, or sometimes two meetings per month.

To improve the working methods, you have to start by improving the way the Council does its internal work. A significant part of the Council's work is still done in consultations. While there has been an effort by the Council to meet more often in public — an increasingly established trend which highlights the role Council presidencies can play when preparing the programmes of work — consultations indeed remain useful. Informal settings are always necessary to help swiftly prepare decisions. However, questions of transparency and inclusiveness remain important within the Council for all Council members involved in the decision-making.

This is why we looked into these issues in the Working Group during the first part of the year.

Following consultations organized by the Council in March of this year, during the presidency of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a discussion was held on further measures to improve interactivity in consultation, better planning of work and better use of conference resources. Those same aspects were further developed in the Working Group and, later on, condensed in the note by the President of the Security Council of 5 June (S/2012/402). The underlying idea is to stress the informality aspects of consultations, better organization of resources to allow more space for subsidiary bodies to meet, more use of videoconferences to avoid the costly presence of briefers, better planning of work by readjusting mandates and reporting cycles with a view to evening up the

workload throughout the year and leaving more time for the Council to prepare decisions and for prevention activities.

Prevention is, indeed, a key aspect for the Council in performing its role under the Charter of the United Nations. Horizon-scanning meetings can be very useful in this regard, by helping the Council to enhance awareness on situations with potential to develop into conflicts.

Last year, several presidencies included such meetings in the programme of work. They can indeed be important opportunities for Council members to exchange views with the Secretariat on new developments in different situations and regions of the world, with deterrence potential, and to help in solving conflicts at an early stage. In my view, these informal meetings, which provide prompt information and allow space for the Council to act preventively, are always helpful.

Horizon-scanning meetings were also discussed in the Working Group this year, but further reflection seems to be necessary on this issue to allow the "horizon scanning" concept to be perfected and thus help dissipate existing reservations to a tool that has the potential to be truly relevant in what prevention is concerned.

Also related to the internal aspects of the Council's work and following the note adopted in June (S/2012/402), practical measures were explored within the Working Group to spread the Council's workload more evenly throughout the year by adjusting, where appropriate, mandate renewal periods, as well as by aligning reporting requirements.

As Chair of the Working Group, I submitted my own recommendations to the Council in July, bearing on the discussions held in the Working Group, aimed at assisting Council members, when preparing decisions on mandate renewals and reporting deadlines, to better plan future Council work.

This is a work always in progress, relying in particular on the initiative of pen holders and on the awareness and input of Council members when drafting decisions to extend mandates and requesting reports. The document regularly updated by the Secretariat and available on the Council's web page on mandates and reporting cycles provides very useful information to that effect, allowing a better overview of the projected workload and of the possible options for its more even distribution throughout the year. We expect and encourage Council members to use this tool when drafting future resolutions.

Pen holders are the Council members who initiate and chair the informal drafting process. Pen holders have an important role to facilitate timely initiatives to ensure Council action, as well as in the exchange of information among Council members. They help preserve continuity in the consideration of issues in the Council, thus enhancing the efficiency of the Council's work. The way they conduct their work is crucial for an informed and transparent decision process and, ultimately, for the efficiency of the Council. The Working Group is continuing the consideration of this matter through a draft note.

The Working Group also focused on the process of appointment of the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies in order to devise ways of enhancing transparency and inclusiveness and facilitate the exchange of information among Council members as well as newly elected members. Following a thorough consideration of this issue by the Working Group, a note by the President of the Security Council was adopted in

December (S/2012/937), by which Council members indicated their support for an informal process with the participation of all members to appoint the Chairs from among Council members in a balanced, transparent, efficient and inclusive way, which facilitates an exchange of information related to the work of the subsidiary bodies involved. To this end, Council members should also consult informally with the newly elected members soon after their election on the appointment of the Chairs for the ensuing year.

In connection with the transparency aspects, I would like to highlight the outstanding work of the Secretariat, always supported and encouraged by the Working Group, in making more information available on the web, including on mandates and reporting cycles, which I alluded to, and the analytical and statistical overview of the Council over the past year, which are indeed very important contributions to help in understanding the Council's work, and the new trends and developments in the area of international peace and security.

Following collaboration between the Department of Political Affairs, Security Council Affairs Division, and the Department of Public Information, Web Services Section, a redesigned website for the Security Council was launched on 4 October. The new website, which is available in all six official languages and accessible to persons with disabilities, features an improved user-friendly layout and additional content.

As well as providing the latest news from the Security Council and its President, the site offers quick and easy access to the most recent Security Council resolutions, presidential statements and press releases. Records of Security Council meetings, past and present, and details on the Council's subsidiary bodies can also be found on the new website.

The website also provides information on the work of the Security Council Affairs Division and highlights the substantive and logistical support provided to the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies, as well as information on the research and guidance role played by the Division. In addition, the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council*, also available in all six languages, has also been fully integrated into the recently overhauled Security Council website.

The site is an ideal tool for Member States, staff members and any other visitors who wish to know more about the workings of the Security Council. A new section on frequently asked questions contains practical information regarding the composition of the Security Council, its mandate and its functions and powers.

As Chair of the Working Group, I commend the efforts of the Secretariat in preparing this new set of informative tools, as well as of the new capacities offered by the Council's web page, which I invite all interested delegations to access and navigate through.

On the external aspects of the Security Council's work, the Working Group is considering further measures to improve transparency and interaction with the wider membership. A note by the President (S/2012/922) was adopted on ways to improve open debates, the annual report, monthly assessments and informal briefings sessions on the monthly work.

On open debates, it was recognized that they can benefit both from the contributions of Council members and from the wider membership. With this in

mind, the date of the open debate should be announced with sufficient time to allow for adequate preparation by all participants. To enhance interactivity, the possibility of inviting non-members to alternate their interventions with those of Council members is now envisaged.

Also, where appropriate for certain open debates, the adoption of an outcome might occur on a date subsequent to that of the open debate in order to allow it to more fully reflect matters raised during the debate. Also, measures to enhance the efficiency of open debates were adopted by encouraging all participants, members and non-members of the Security Council alike to be succinct and focused in their interventions, which, whenever possible, should not exceed five minutes (with the option of distributing a more detailed written statement).

Concerning the annual report to the General Assembly (and further to the measures contained in the note by the President of the Security Council of 26 July 2010 (S/2010/507)), the new note acknowledges that presidencies in charge of preparing the draft introduction to the report may consider organizing interactive informal exchanges of views with the wider membership prior to the adoption of the report.

Also, as a new measure, members of the Security Council encourage the Presidents in charge of the presentation of the report to the General Assembly to report to Council members on relevant suggestions and observations raised at the General Assembly debate on the annual report.

Overall, the note encourages continuing efforts to ensure the inclusion in the report of more substantive information on the Council's work and on measures to improve the working methods.

The note reiterates also that the report will continue to be adopted at a public meeting of the Security Council, where members of the Council who wish to do so may comment on the work of the Council for the period covered by the report, something that was already foreseen in document S/2010/507 but was never done.

Finally, the note recognizes the usefulness of the monthly assessments by Security Council Presidents in providing as much information as possible on the main aspects of the work of the Council during that month and their submission soon after the end of their respective presidencies.

Presidents are encouraged to hold informal briefing sessions with the wider membership on the work of the Council at the end of the respective presidencies, in the same way they are now held at the start to present the programme of work.

Formal wrap-up sessions were also acknowledged as possible formats to be used to that effect.

These are some of the aspects that have been discussed in the Working Group this year and agreed through the note recently adopted. We now hope that the Council, with the help of the Secretariat, starts implementing all these new measures in a way that translates into a more transparent, interactive and efficient practice.

I am conscious that improving the working methods is an ongoing task. The Council has done much in recent years on this matter as a result of the Council members' efforts and especially those of the previous Chairs of this Working Group (Japan, Panama, Slovakia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), whom I salute, which

resulted in the adoption of document S/2010/507. But we all know that there is always room for improvement and that the note is the point of departure, not an end in itself.

On the other side, the support and stimulus of the wider membership is essential to the work of the Working Group. This is why I promoted, early this year, a very useful exchange of views of members of the Working Group with the "Small Five Group" (Costa Rica, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Singapore and Switzerland), where we could discuss many of the proposals put forward by this Group.

Also very important in my view are the open debates on working methods. Now organized on an annual basis, they are excellent opportunities to gather relevant input on this matter from Council members and the wider membership.

Early this year, the Working Group organized a meeting to follow up on the input received at the previous open debate that we organized during our presidency in November 2011. A list of proposals put forward at the debate was prepared and served as a good basis for the current work of the Working Group.

One year after, thanks to the Indian presidency, another open debate was organized. I found this debate very useful. Many proposals put forward provided important food for thought to the Council's future work. Such debates are invaluable, as they stimulate Council members to work towards further improvements and to increase the awareness necessary for the full implementation of document S/2010/507.

Last Wednesday we held the last Working Group meeting under my chairmanship, as Portugal will leave the Council in January 2013. We opted to conclude this full year's work in the Working Group by looking at the future, through the follow-up to the open debate we held last month.

After all the work done, this last meeting helped put things in the right perspective: on Council working methods there is always room for improvement. Surely, the ideas collected in the open debate with the wider membership gave Council members plenty to consider in the year to come.

I wish the next Chair of the Working Group all the best. We, on our part, will continue, as we have always done, to support this agenda and all efforts in the Security Council to promote transparency, interaction and efficacy.

In conclusion, over this past year the Working Group met 15 times and adopted three notes by the President, covering issues related to the internal and external aspects of the Council's work (interactivity, conference resources, process of appointment of the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies, open debates, annual report, monthly assessments and briefings by the Presidents of the Council). It continued to open up to the outside by exchanging views with the "Small Five Group" and focusing on the follow-up to the annual open debates on working methods. But it is never enough. I am sure the work will continue with a renewed energy next year.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to many of you for your support and encouragement to the work of the Working Group to improve the working methods. I thank you.